

Eastern MRS Meeting Notes
April 26, 2007
Cumberland Co DSS

Counties Present: Brunswick, Cartaret, Chatham, Cumberland, Duplin, Hoke, Lee, New Hanover, Orange, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, Wayne.

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Data Collection

CSFR

Foster Homes – revisited

Training – Making it Stick

Barriers and Victories

WF/CPS Collaboration

Data Collection - Update on MRS database/DataWarehouse from Heather

- The changes to the web system are starting to be implemented.
 - As of yesterday some fields have been removed. These are:
 - 210-12 Assignment of Accepted Reports (we can figure this out based on the finding.)
 - 210-20 If Petition filed with Juvenile Court, the date of that petition.
 - 210-22 Previous CPS contact with agency
 - 210 and 215 – 25 Criminal Disposition
 - The risk re-assessment risk levels are now also correct. Previously they were incorrect so that if you were entering them correctly you might have gotten an error message and could not save the information.
- In the next month DIRM will be making more changes to the MRS database. This may result in the MRS database being unavailable for a period of time. If you have workers trying to access it to key and it is unavailable, wait a couple of hours and try back before calling Heather or the Help Desk.
- Since they are uploading the changes a couple of pieces at a time the best way for me to keep you informed will be the MRS email.
- Once all the changes are made the 5106 will be updated one time and a DCD letter will come out.
- Currently constructing queries for the DataWarehouse. Reviewed the ones we are working on and solicited ideas for others.
- Thinking about training in late May or June.

CFSR

- We were the 2nd state to go though the CFSR – we failed which they had told us up front that we would (they said everyone would fail.)
- The feds felt that MRS was a significant strength.
- The lead reviewer was so impressed with MRS she has asked us to send in a paper talking about MRS for publication on the Children's Bureau website as best practice.
- Community folks reported that MRS had completely changed the Child Welfare System.

- Have already started working on implementing changes in areas where we could use some improvement. Nothing really dramatic that will come as a complete surprise.
- One area needing some improvement was non-custodial (absent) parents. Not just locating them (although we should work harder at that) but increased contact and attempts at engagement. Want them included in case plans.
- Preliminary data indicates that Mecklenburg county is one of the best metropolitan areas in the country.
- The feds specifically looked at involvement with courts, older youth in foster care, and tribes.

Foster Homes – revisited

In February we talked about assessments on children in Foster Homes. All reports on children in Foster Care must be taken as investigative assessments. We discussed the pros and cons of offering the option to take these as family assessments if they met criteria. (For a review of these discussions see notes from the three February meetings.)

- Most people here could were not at the meeting in February so had some new thoughts.
 - Felt that if you give that respect to a birth family we should give it to our foster families as well.
 - Foster parents are raised to a higher level than birth parents are. How would it work to be providing services to a foster family? We took the children out of one bad situation; don't want to leave them in another bad situation in foster care. She was not really sure how she wanted to say it off the top of her head, but she was uncomfortable with it.
 - Even if you had the option of using family assessments, the more serious ones would be going to investigative assessments anyway.
- It is possible that many of the 'higher standards' that people were concerned about are really licensing issues, not CPS issues. There IS a higher standard but that is with the licensing.
 - You can't sub on a licensing issue if the child was not at risk or unsafe just because a licensing issue was violated.
- Feel that some people may overreact to the report because it is on licensed Foster Parents. So concerned with appearances and being sure kids are not being abused and neglected while in Foster Care, that we may 'freak out' unnecessarily and we can do harm being doing investigations that were unnecessary even if we unsubstantiate
- Some concern about the cross county issue part – what if the investigating county does not philosophically agree with the track that originating county assigned it to? How will that play out?
- What about the court system? Each county's relationship with their court system is different. Some were concerned that the language of family assessments may be used by the biological parents attorney's and the judge to weaken the DSS's court case. For some counties judges just want to know the facts of the case, they don't care if you call it Svcs Provided or Unsubstantiated, but on the other hand some feel that if the finding is in family assessment language they may see it as 'weaker'.
- What about kids that disrupt their own placements? Everyone has had children that disrupt their own placements on a regular basis. When DSS is

pretty sure from the outset that this is what is happening, the family assessment approach is gentler on the foster parents and the child. It may show the child a new perspective of what they were doing when they disrupted a placement. Also keeps the foster parents off the central registry, even as unsubstantiated perps when the child was the one attempting to disrupt the placement.

Training – Making it Stick

How do we follow up with training? Send people to training and months later they aren't 'doing' family centered – how do you sustain and reinforce the training? You can't just go to a training and then never talk about it again. Any ideas about this?

- New Hanover has a relationship with a professor at UNCW that comes in periodically to talk about family centered practice. Specifically works on the language that you use and how that affects the case.
- Not everyone can contract with a professor but supervisors and others can reinforce the family centered practice that you have learned. It's hard because we do get so busy but have to make an effort to make the time.
- The initial trainings were good, but wishes that she could go back and take it again after she really "got it" internally. However, reading books, sharing these with co-workers helps. Also, the influx of interns and younger workers that have never done it any other way helps.
- Your agency has to support the culture of learning and training. If training is thought of as a state mandate that takes you away from your caseload it is not valued and trainees don't take it as seriously. If it is seen as valuable then they will take more away.
- Some people get people that participated in training to do some sort of presentation on the training when they get back.
- Bulletin boards – some counties have different units that are responsible for these for 3 months.
- One county makes her staff write in the dictation what they did that was family centered- how did they identify strengths, how did they partner, etc.
- If you are going to tell families and workers that you want to hear their input, but you don't take their comments to heart and listen, that is worse than not asking at all.

Barriers & Victories

We are almost a year and a half into statewide implementation - what has gone well – or what might have surprised you in the way that it worked out?

- Started a support group for supervisors and try to hold these in a strengths based manner.

What are barriers still?

- Hard to be strengths based with chronic families. Short of moving in with them sometimes you are at your wits end and don't know what to do with the families. This is even harder with more experienced workers who have been doing investigative assessments for so much longer.
 - Have taken the idea that there are some families that just need a 'tune up' periodically. Some of them have incorporated DSS into their lives and they will sabotage their own progress so that DSS will come back.
- Some counties are still having trouble getting the philosophy incorporated.

- Had a lot of back and forth discussion about implementing and how was the best way to do it. Many people favored baby steps but also admitted that at a certain point you have to stop being slow and gentle because some people will never change if you don't make them. At some point you say, "this is the new way to do things" and get on board, or reexamine what you are doing.
- However, you have to be change ready – you must allow them time to prepare, and be comfortable and trained before you force the change. Acknowledge that changing to the MRS system is a good thing but there is a sense of loss in worker's comfort zone and their self esteem because they no longer feel competent and must regain that.
- One county allowed their experienced SW become the investigators and as they hired new people those became the family assessors. The problem now, 9 months down the road, is that the folks are too specialized. Although their CPR has told them that family and investigative assessments should not be that different, this county feels that theirs are night and day. In fact when the workers are on call they can't even really handle the other types of cases. If they change tracks, they even change workers!
 - Suggestions were made that their workers partner with someone from the other side of the fence.
 - Forcing them to take whatever they get when they are on call will allow workers to get experience with the other type of assessment. But don't leave them on their own, have a more experienced SW to partner with.
- Being family centered and meeting in the evenings or after 5 is still an issue for some counties. There was one county that was still struggling with implementation.
 - Other counties told them that you had to do some sort of flexing for social workers. Put limits on it to protect the workers personal life and the agency.
 - Do not allow everything that happens after 5 to be dumped on the on call worker, it's not possible for them to do that.
 - One county suggested that instead of saying to the family "When to do you want to meet?" and letting them choose any time they wanted, to give them 3 or 4 options, some of which are in the evening, but not too late, and generally they will pick one of those.
 - Workers may decide to always work 12-8 on one day a week and try to schedule appointments on those days, or the reverse, and protect a certain day of the week to not stay late.

WF/CPS Collaboration

What has been going well? Either something new or something that a county has been doing for some time?

- New Hanover moved WF under Child Welfare. This helped communication. Then they decided that WF workers would do family assessments if a report came in on a family that was already on their caseload. These workers shadowed the CPS workers.

- But, does CPS have a good idea of what work first does? Probably not as well as WF knows CPS, but they are getting there and also they are much more willing to go and ask when they do not know.
- They are now located together – cross training is going on across cubicle walls.
- Their mandatory cases and child only cases are dropping for WF but the CPS reports are not dropping. They are looking into why that is.
- Planning to have 4 social workers that will be handling the child only cases and put some preventative services in place.
- WF workers were originally worried about harming the relationship they had built with the family by doing assessments on them. However, most of the time the families would rather have that social worker doing their assessments because they already know and like that worker.
- However, when they are doing WF the 'client' is the parent and in CPS the 'client' is the family so it is somewhat of a shift. It is a skill to learn how to make this shift, but most of them are very good at it.
- Send notices of cases they will be staffing to WF. If they are involved with the case they come to the staffings. They are a mandatory collateral. Supposed to be going out with them before case plans are made so that the 2 plans can co-exist.

What would you like to see?

- Have tried to get a WF rep to sit in on the Permanency Planning team but this has not happened yet.
- How do you get to know each other? Problems when people are in different buildings and even when you are in the same building. You need to take it to somewhat of a social level so that people get to know each other and can then make a connection so that they can know who to talk to later on.
 - Durham Co in the past paired CPS and WF a buddy that was randomly assigned. They made clues and a scavenger hunt and gave out prizes based on how long you took to find your buddy and what you knew about them. Because it was a fun thing and not a forced introduction it went well.
- When AFI does training they give you assigned seats so you can't sit with the people you came with. If you have interactions between CPS and WF don't let all the CPS people sit together, force them to mix up some.
- One county asked how you get WF to buy in – they seem to think CPS is trying to get them (WF) do their job. Have to see not only what WF can do for CPS but what can CPS do for WF.
- Last March the theme of MRS meetings was collaboration between CPS and WF. All across the state there were roomfuls of WF workers and no CPS workers.
 - Trying to figure out why CPS doesn't seem to think they need to know about the WF side.

Other Issues

Any discussions about working with Hispanic families?

- Patrick said that this was a focus of the federal review, how we work with minorities overall. Several counties have gone through disproportionality studies (how black children are over-represented in child welfare.) Just like

we did after the first review, we will be making some pretty large changes after this review. This will be an issue for the Hispanic population.

- Some people here had MRS brochures in Spanish and will email to Holly so that she can distribute it to other counties.

MRS Institute

- Holly sent out call for Presentations – even if you do not want to do one but you know a community partner who would be a good presenter, forward it to them.
- Will be held in Asheville in August 27-29.

Any kind of Documentation Template?

- For the last 8-9 months the Division has been working on a Documentation committee. Ended up putting it on hold until after the CFSR to see if they needed to incorporate anything based on that.
- They had developed a template that took them through 210 but will need to take a closer look based on some of the CFSR findings.
- Looking to provide a template that is like Structured Intake so that you can tailor it to your agency as long as it includes the minimum requirements in the document.

The DCD letter that was sent out regarding the Child Medical Evaluation Program

- The letter encouraged the counties to fill out the forms completely and accurately.
- It has been mentioned that the letter seemed to discourage people from using the program. This was not the intention, it is just that we need to move this progress along, so if you do want to use this, just do it correctly.

Future Meetings:

May

Eastern – May 22nd - Martin Co Community College

Central - May 23rd – Forsyth Co.

June

Central – June 20th Randolph Co

July

East – July 18th Edgecombe Co.